

Extensions of Remarks

HON. FRANK R. WOLF  
of Virginia  
Wednesday, September 23, 2009

*Administration Once Again Sidelines Human Rights*

Mr. WOLF. Madam Speaker, I again rise to express my deep disappointment with the Obama administration's sidelining of human rights in U.S. foreign policy.

I submit for the Record an op-ed from today's *Washington Post* aptly titled "A Cold Shoulder to Liberty." Columnist Michael Gerson writes of the administration's snub of the Dalai Lama on his upcoming visit to the nation's capital.

Two years ago, the Dalai Lama received the *Congressional Gold Medal* in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. President Bush personally presented it to him. I was there for the occasion where this man of peace and dignity was honored for his life's work in promoting basic rights for his people.

Next month, the Dalai Lama will again visit Washington, but this time he will be denied a visit with President Obama lest it ruffle feathers in Beijing in the lead up to the president's visit there in November.

I am reminded of another administration which declined to meet with a dissident for fear of souring an upcoming meeting. It was 1975, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was set to visit Washington. Henry Kissinger led the charge in refusing him a meeting with President Ford, who was worried about upsetting Soviet leader Brezhnev prior to the upcoming summit.

Contrast this approach with President Reagan's 1988 speech in defense of religious liberty at the ancient Danilov Monastery in Russia. In his remarks he had the courage to invoke a quote by Solzhenitsyn about the faith of the people of Russia. In so doing, he respectfully made the point that religious freedom is central to who we are as Americans, and as such our leaders will not be silenced on this score for fear of offending oppressive governments.

I believe that history shows this administration could learn from that approach.

Sadly, the White House's treatment of the Dalai Lama is not an isolated incident. Gerson notes, "...rebuffing the Dalai Lama is part of a pattern. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has argued that pressing China on human rights 'can't interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate change crisis and the security crisis...'"

But this begs the question, what of the human rights crisis in China?

Just yesterday, the *Associated Press* reported that "China has closed Tibet to foreign tourists and deployed soldiers armed with machine guns in the streets of Beijing — part of a raft of stringent

security measures ahead of the 60th anniversary of communist rule. Even kite-flying has been banned in the capital.”

This is the government we are trying to curry favor with? I’d prefer to find common cause and solidarity with the people of Tibet, with the persecuted house church and Catholic bishops, with the repressed Falun Gong.

The administration’s approach in China has been mirrored elsewhere at the expense of oppressed people the world over.

Gerson continues, “Overtures to repressive governments in Iran, Cuba, North Korea, Venezuela, Syria and Egypt have generally ignored the struggles of dissidents and prisoners in those nations. So far, the Obama era is hardly a high point of human rights solidarity.”

It seems we could also add Burma to that list. Today’s *Post* reports that “For the first time in nine years, the United States allowed Burma’s foreign minister to come to Washington, a sign of softening U.S. policy toward the military junta that has run that Asian nation for nearly five decades.”

The *Post* notes, “Under the 2003 Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act, the White House needs to approve a waiver to allow Burmese officials who are attending the U.N. General Assembly to travel more than 25 miles outside of New York.”

On the reported eve of the administration’s much anticipated release of a Burma policy review, the waiving of this sanction for a major general in the Burmese Army, to essentially sight-see in Washington, sends the wrong message.

Earlier this week, the *Post* featured an article with the headline, “U.S. Faces Doubts About Leadership on Human Rights,” which reported, “as the U.N. General Assembly gets underway this week, human rights activists and political analysts say the new approach has undercut U.S. leadership on human rights issues.”

I submit for the *Record* the entire article, which offers a grim but accurate assessment of this failed approach.

Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Are we not friends of the persecuted Coptic Christian in Egypt? Are we not friends of the North Koreans enslaved in the gulag? Are we not friends of the repressed Cuban or Iranian democracy activist?

The answer to all of these questions is a resounding yes, which makes this administration’s deliberate sidelining of human rights that much more devastating.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/22/AR2009092203006.html>

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